

INFO	LOG-00	MFS-00	MFA-00	EEB-00	AMAD-00	A-00	CIAE-00
	INL-00	DNI-00	DOTE-00	WHA-00	DHSE-00	FAAE-00	UTED-00
	FOE-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	MOFM-00	MOF-00	CDC-00
	DCP-00	OIG-00	PER-00	DOHS-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00
	EVR-00	NCTC-00	ASDS-00	FMP-00	CBP-00	DSCC-00	DRL-00
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 FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7127
 INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
 AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
 AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

UNCLAS GEORGETOWN 000179

DEPT FOR DS/DSS/OSAC, DS/IP/WHA

E.O. 12958: N/A
 TAGS: [AMGT](#) [APER](#) [ASEC](#)
 SUBJECT: 2009 OSAC CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT FOR GEORGETOWN

REF: 132056

11. This report provides a historical record of crime in Georgetown, Guyana and how it affects the American private sector community that resides in country.

 OVERALL CRIME AND SAFETY

1I. Criminal activity in Georgetown continues to increase, particularly violent crimes against people and property. Foreigners in general are viewed as targets of opportunity. Serious crime, including murder and armed robbery, continues to be a major problem.

In 2008, an attack in the Georgetown suburb of Lusignan and in the Essequibo River town of Bartica by heavily armed gangs resulted in the deaths of more than 20 persons, mostly innocent Guyanese civilians. There were also several instances of random shootings at night at police headquarters or police stations in Georgetown. Guyana Security forces shot and killed the leader of the gang thought to be responsible for these incidents; however, there is still concern that remnants of these criminal gangs and others exist and continue to operate.

Armed robberies continue to occur intermittently, especially in major businesses and shopping districts. Hotel room strong-arm break-ins also occur, so travelers should use caution when opening their hotel room doors and should safeguard valuables left in hotel rooms. Criminals may act brazenly, and police officers themselves have been the victims of assaults and shootings. Vehicle thefts are common anytime of the day or night. Vehicle occupants should keep their doors locked never leaving items in plain sight, and be aware of their surroundings at all times. Robbery and vehicle theft occur with some frequency in Georgetown and New Amsterdam. After dark, it is highly advisable not to walk or bike and only drive from venue to venue. Residential burglaries are less common when homes have guards who pose a deterrent to would-be thieves.

Traffic accidents are a major concern in Georgetown. Road and driving conditions are poor. Police only sporadically enforce local traffic laws and, as a result, local drivers drive recklessly. Stop signs and traffic signals are often treated as suggestions only. Be very cognizant of other cars, large commercial vehicles, mini-buses, horse drawn carts, bicycles, mopeds, scooters, motorcycles, stray dogs, sleeping animals and free range livestock, as they all share narrow, poorly maintained roads. A combination of very aggressive, experienced drivers, along with inexperienced,

timid drivers makes driving in Guyana especially dangerous. Driving at unsafe speeds, reckless driving, tailgating, quick stops without signaling, passing at intersections, and passing on crowded streets is common place. Driving at night poses additional concerns as many roads are not lit, drivers do not lower high beam lights, livestock sleep on the road and many pedestrians congregate by the roadside. If you are involved in an accident, you are expected to stay at the scene until the police arrive to take a report unless there is an imminent threat.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE

II. Although Guyana has ongoing border disputes with its neighbors, Venezuela and Suriname, Guyana is not currently engaged in any armed hostilities with any country. Post does not anticipate violence resulting from existing territorial or political controversies in the near future.

There have been no documented incidents of political violence during this reporting period.

POST SPECIFIC CONCERNS

III. Arms trafficking is big business in Guyana, and it is very easy, and common for criminals to obtain weapons despite the arduous licensing requirements for the average person. A handgun, knife and/or machete or "cutlass" are the weapons of choice. This is also tied to the drug trafficking problem in Guyana. Drug trafficking organizations are prevalent and pose the biggest challenge to local law enforcement in Georgetown. Airport security and customs officials are detaining and arresting individuals on a weekly basis who are trying to smuggle drugs out of Guyana into the United States.

Drug "mules," often U.S. citizens perceived to be able to easily travel with their U.S. passport, have also increased this past year.

Armed robbery of business/patron establishments are becoming increasingly common in Georgetown. Criminals are usually organized, travel in groups of two or more and conduct surveillance on their victims. The limited police presence in most areas is largely ineffective in preventing crime. Criminals will not hesitate to show a knife as an intimidation factor during a robbery. According to 2008 crime statistics, there were approximately 554 incidents reported to the RSO of which there were 122 murders, 95 shooting incidents and 170 armed robberies. Periodically, we do have robberies/attacks on American citizens and in areas where expats frequent.

Corruption is widely perceived to be a common practice within the police department and overall government in Georgetown. Police are paid off, and are working with the criminals by either assisting or protecting them. Judges are subject to threats and/or bribes and defendants involved in drug organizations can usually field better attorneys than the Government's prosecutors. As a result, criminals go free on a regular basis. It is common knowledge that some police are, or have been involved in criminal activity.

There are two main rainy seasons in Guyana (December-January and May-July). However, even at other times of the year, heavy rains are possible and flash flooding can occur. The coastal plain floods occasionally and serious flooding occurred in Greater Georgetown and along the East Coast in January, 2005 causing significant damage. There was also isolated flooding on the East Coast in early 2009. Incidence of water-borne diseases increases during periods of flooding. Special precautions should be taken when eating fruits, vegetables and drinking potable/bottled water at all times, but especially during the rainy seasons.

POLICE RESPONSE

IV. Local police in Guyana have resource and manpower limitations that inhibit their ability to deter or respond to criminal activity. Police patrols are rare or nonexistent. There is an emergency telephone number "911" for police, fire or rescue. The fire department provides a timely response, while a police response, especially during the night, is a rarity for all but the most serious crimes. The police response to emergency calls is often too slow (15 minutes or longer). When the police do respond, they have a limited amount of authority to act on their part, and at times attempt to solicit bribes as officers are not compensated well.

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

IV. Medical care in Guyana does not meet U.S. standards. Care is available for minor medical conditions, although quality is very inconsistent. Emergency care and hospitalization for major medical illnesses or surgery are very limited, due to the lack of appropriately trained specialists, below standard in-hospital care, and poor sanitation. There are very few ambulances in Guyana. Ambulance service is limited to transportation without any medical care and is frequently not available for emergencies. Emergency medical services can be contacted by either "911" or "913" for an ambulance, but this number is not always operational and an ambulance may not be available.

The Georgetown Public Hospital on Parade Street is the one commonly used for responding to medical emergencies and trauma such as traffic accidents. The hospital is located approximately a quarter mile from the American Embassy and has adequately trained staff and equipment to stabilize those in need of attention, before medical evacuation to the United States can be arranged.

Visitors are advised to bring prescription medicine sufficient for their length of stay and should be aware that Guyana's humid climate may affect some medicines. Some prescription medicines (mainly generic) are available.

Special attention should be paid to HIV/AIDS in Guyana. In addition to elevated infection rates among high-risk populations such as commercial sex workers and mobile populations such as miners or loggers, data from the World Health Organization estimate that Guyana has among the highest prevalence rates in Latin America and the Caribbean.

TRAVEL PRECAUTIONS

VI. All Americans are reminded to be aware of their surroundings at all times. Local and international news broadcasts should be monitored for events that may impact on the local security situation. Americans who become victims of crime while in Guyana are advised to contact American Citizen Services at 011-592-225-4900 x4222, or the U.S. Embassy Duty Officer after hours at 011-592-623-1992.

Criminals in Guyana are increasingly willing to resort to violence while committing all types of crimes.

If confronted by an armed criminal, do not argue or attempt to confront him/her in any way. Quickly relinquish what you are asked to surrender.

Most foreigners are very visible in public and should take precautions when visiting downtown areas. Visitors should avoid wearing expensive jewelry, displaying large sums of cash in public, or otherwise appearing ostentatious. Visitors are advised to make every attempt to change currency

at hotels or airports. Visitors are strongly discouraged from exchanging currency on the street, as this is a dangerous practice.

There have been reports of criminal incidents in the vicinities of the major hotels used by tourists and US Government employees traveling on official orders. Walking along outside after dark, even in the immediate vicinity of these hotels, is not recommended. Most violent crimes against foreigners have been confined to the capital. However, there have been a few incidents of violent crimes committed in other parts of the country as well.

The use of public transportation, such as mini-buses, by visitors unfamiliar with the country is highly discouraged. The use of reputable taxis is generally acceptable, such as those offered through the major hotels and tourist agencies, as they are usually safer, more reliable and inexpensive. Travel to the interior of the country requires caution; therefore, travelers wishing to visit the interior are advised to make use of well-established tour companies for safer experiences. There have been reports of tourists and foreigners being robbed while traveling in the countryside, occasional reports of bandits on rural roads and piracy on the local rivers.

FURTHER INFORMATION

VII. American Citizen Services can be contacted at 011-592-225-4900 x4222. After regular business hours and weekends the Embassy Duty Officer can be reached at 011-592-623-1992. If the Embassy Duty Officer cannot be reached contact the Regional Security Officer at 011-592-227-3918 or 011-592-665-1010.

OSAC COUNTRY COUNCIL

VIII. There is no Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) in Georgetown. The Embassy maintains contact with the business community through its Economic/Commercial section. The RSO is working to establish an OSAC Committee in Georgetown as there are a large number of Guyanese/Americans present, and a number of American owned businesses. RSO will consult with the South America Regional OSAC Coordinator to obtain further information.

12. The point of contact for this cable is RSO Millie Dominguez. The number of the American Embassy is 011-592-225-4900. RSO Dominguez is available to provide security information to any American company. RSO Dominguez can be contacted via email at dominguezmh@state.gov or through the RSO Direct Line at 011-592-227-3918 or the Embassy main number at x4245.

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